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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 002602

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E AND A/S FRAZER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [SO](#)

SUBJECT: SOMALIA - ARS LEADERS READY FOR RADICAL CHANGE

REF: A. NAIROBI 2543

[1](#)B. NAIROBI 2598

[1](#)C. NAIROBI 2580

Classified By: PolOff Jessica Davis Ba. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Leaders of the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) seek to consolidate support from their recent mission in Somalia and are committed to the Djibouti Process and a unity government, even as internal strife threatens to implode the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The ARS views President Yusuf as an irredeemable impediment to the peace process and made clear that leadership in Somalia's three highest offices must change. They provided various scenarios by which Yusuf could be immediately sidelined, stating that security considerations and the humanitarian catastrophe demand the international community and Somalis to select new leaders before a 2009 transition. They argued that even if a TFG leadership change might be disruptive, nothing can be worse than the status quo. ARS leaders evinced sincere appreciation for consultations with the USG and invited continued discussions about the way forward. They emphasized that increased visible support from the USG is critical to galvanizing increased tangible international and Somali support for the peace process. End Summary.

Unwavering Support for Djibouti Process

[1](#)2. (SBU) In the last two weeks, we have spoken several times with ARS leaders who insist that despite current difficulties within the TFG (Ref A), they remain fully committed to the Djibouti Process, a unity government, and to implementing the cease-fire. On November 13, Special Envoy John Yates spoke by phone with ARS Chairman Sheikh Sharif Ahmed and Chairman of the Central Committee Sharif Hassan Aden, both of whom were in Djibouti. The "Two Sharifs" were extremely grateful for his call and underlined that they looked forward to talking more with us prior to and during the next meeting of the High Level Committee (HLC) and the Joint Security Committee (JSC) November 22-25 in Djibouti. We have met three times with ARS Central Committee Chairman Sharif Hassan Aden -- on November 5 in Nairobi, on November 9 in Dubai, and on November 17, again in Nairobi. During these meetings, Hassan spoke pragmatically on how to capitalize on the recent mission in Somalia, the difficulties of forming a unity government when "there is nothing left of the TFG but its name" and when questions about Ethiopian intentions and constant pressure from spoilers all around consistently threaten the process.

[1](#)3. (SBU) S/E Yates congratulated the "Two Sharifs" on their

successful recent mission to Jowhar and Beledweyne (reftel A). Sheikh Sharif said support on the ground was excellent and people came from other areas, most notably Mogadishu, to consult with them. Prevailing interest of elements inside Somalia seemed to be "prove to us that collaboration with the TFG in the Djibouti process is productive and the correct strategy." In that regard, Sharif expressed the ARS's appreciation for Embassy Nairobi statement of November 7 noting concern about the increase in violence in Mogadishu and re-iterating USG support for the Djibouti Process. He said it was the strong endorsement needed from the international community, most specifically the USG, and precisely the kind of political support they need to demonstrate backing.

14. (SBU) With S/E Yates, Sheikh Sharif emphasized that any movement of Ethiopian troops, no matter how slight, would be extremely helpful in demonstrating dividends from the Djibouti Process. Sharif Hassan made this same point in all our meetings, asking for USG assistance with Ethiopia fulfilling the guidelines for withdrawal in the Djibouti Agreement, and the timeline set forward in the agreement to implement the cease fire. As long as Ethiopia remains in Somalia, Sharif Hassan said, it will be impossible to generate the grassroots support needed to truly implement a peace process. In Dubai, Hassan asked us pointedly about Ethiopia's plans, indicating that no matter how much momentum they achieved on the ground, Ethiopia's actions could undermine any achievement. Sheikh Sharif said they had not/not been in direct touch with Ethiopians since the October 28 - 29 Nairobi IGAD Summit but the ARS is

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communicating with Addis through intermediaries.

15. (C) S/E Yates reminded the ARS of our concerns as emphasized to them by A/S Frazer about the humanitarian situation. Sheikh Sharif said if the international community (meaning at a minimum, the USG) would work more closely with the ARS, they could help on the ground. The TFG, they said, is too weak to do so. Sheikh Sharif said their capabilities could be tested in either of the two areas he had visited -- Jowhar or Beledweyne. In our last meeting in Nairobi, Sharif Hassan intimated that both the Ethiopians and President Yusuf were lightening rods for the recruitment of extremists who are exacerbating the crisis. He told us that in 2004 when Yusuf came to power, there were no Islamic Courts and in 2006, Yusuf did not follow the suggested approach of dealing with al-Shabaab and instead made them stronger. "Our people are dying; they cannot wait for several months for Yusuf to complete his term," Hassan concluded.

Security Considerations

16. (C) In their conversation with S/E Yates, the "Two Sharifs" asked for material support for the 5,000 member ARS "police" force (their half of the 10,000 member monitoring force with TFG), foreseen by the Joint Security Committee in its plan to implement the cessation of armed confrontation. They requested the means to help persuade youth, now attracted by al-Shabaab and its resources, that there were other, better, alternatives to pay-for-fighting. In Dubai, Sharif Hassan said the ARS is looking for the USG to make good on our promise to support a joint ARS/TFG security force. Hassan told us that a paid force that could be immediately stood up would be key to preventing any security vacuum as Ethiopia withdraws. He said that at present, al-Shabaab is using piracy ransoms to fund its armed opposition. "They are paying children between the ages of 13 and 25 50 dollars per month. If we can offer 100 dollars per month, we can have the support of all of Somalia," Hassan stressed.

17. (C) When S/E Yates raised al-Shabaab's recent territorial gains in Lower Shabelle, Sheikh Sharif claimed the situation

in Marka, where ARS still controlled the police station and the port, would be rectified in 2-3 days. (Note: The situation in Marka remains fluid as groups allied with the Islamic Courts Union and al-Shabaab vie for ultimate control of the area and its strategic port. Thus far, there has been no visible push by ARS supporters against those who occupy the town.) Sharif said the "people of the region" were organizing to combat al-Shabaab and he implied other "outsiders" who were claiming to have taken control, including ARS-Asmara, do not have command. Hassan also emphasized that the people do not want al-Shabaab, but they do not have the means to fight. "Give us the financial support, we are ready to fight -- we Somalis will stand in Mogadishu and face al-Shabaab," he insisted.

Governance Challenges Intensify

18. (C) The ARS leaders confirmed there had been no real movement on a Unity Government and that their vision is still as laid out to A/S Frazer in Nairobi (Ref B). They acknowledged that although the IGAD Summit communique offered the TFG an opportunity to reorganize and become more cohesive in advance of a Unity Government, the TFG squandered this opportunity. Hassan was more pointed in his criticism of Yusuf saying that it is impossible to work with him as he believes he is the only person ordained to lead Somalia. Hassan compared Yusuf's personality to Siad Barre's, minus the military force behind Barre's dictatorship. On November 17, reflecting on the impasse within the TFG, Hassan told us, "If the international community insists on preserving Yusuf, it will not serve Somalia." We made it absolutely clear that it is not the USG policy to categorically back Yusuf, but that we had serious concerns about the ramifications of a grab for power in the event of his removal. We said we are concerned with the process, not personalities.

19. (C) Hassan agreed that there is some risk in changing the TFG leadership but that anything is better than the status quo. The TFG, under Yusuf has remained resolute in its position and is busy outside of Somalia, fighting each other.

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"We want reconciliation, and all Yusuf wants to do is fight; we are ready to talk with him, but he will refuse." Hassan briefly outlined various scenarios to sideline Yusuf: 1) The TFG President would be stripped of his power, but remain through the end of his term; 2) Yusuf would be removed entirely and substituted with another Darod personality chosen within the clan; 3) the TFG and ARS would address the issue in the next meeting of the High Level Committee and work through specific plans to select new leaders. On November 17, Hassan once again told us the ARS is ready to engage in active negotiations on the composition of a unity government in Djibouti. The ARS position is that all political positions and influence be shared equally between the ARS and the TFG, he said.

110. (SBU) S/E Yates asked the ARS leaders about their support in Mogadishu and whether or not they could help the TFG to implement Banadir Administration reform as stipulated in the IGAD communique and August Addis agreement. They claimed, as noted above, that many community elders had traveled from Mogadishu to see them and they would go there on their next trip into Somalia. Lamenting TFG weakness, the Sharifs said they'd like to discuss with us arrangements on the ground in more depth. In our meeting, Hassan told us the ARS has not participated in the Benadir reform process because they have not been consulted and invited into the process by the TFG. Nonetheless, he said that the first priority is to finalize the political terms at the national level and then work through details on how to do the same at the local administrative level.

Immediate Support Necessary

¶11. (C) The most salient point in all of these conversations was that ARS-Djibouti needed more signs of support for the Djibouti Process being led by SRSO Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah. In our meetings, Sharif Hassan emphasized that this support must be tangible and should begin with immediate financial support for a joint security force. He said that thus far, the international community had delivered little more than words.

Citing the European Community's support to bring all of the parliamentarians to Nairobi, Hassan said that in many cases the international community seems to be working at odds with the Djibouti Process. In our last meeting he concluded, "The USG must not be silent -- it must state and demonstrate its support for the Djibouti process. With this support, other international actors will easily come on board, as will Somalis."

Comment

¶12. (C) Both Sheikh Sharif and Sharif Hassan claimed to be much more comfortable and reassured about working with the USG, specifically citing their meeting with A/S Frazer, the Somalia Unit's outreach to them, and Embassy Nairobi's public statement. They said that despite the challenges and risks, they remain committed to the process and look forward to continued consultations with us prior to the November 22 - 25 Djibouti discussions. Other members of the ARS Central Committee have commented to us that IGAD's renewed involvement has further clouded what was already a difficult and murky process. They told us that Sheikh Sharif is getting advice from all sides, much of it unhelpful, leaving him without a clear vision on how to attain the goals set forward in the Djibouti process agreements. This confusion is exacerbated by a TFG so fully consumed with internal strife that it is "nonexistent," they said. The ARS leaders asked for our advice on the mechanisms to begin implementing a unity government, emphasizing that it is clear that nothing good can happen with President Yusuf still at the helm. They have been assured that the USG fully supports the Djibouti Process and all Somali parties who attempt to advance it.

RANNEBERGER